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MR. BALFOUR'S LAND BILL.

BY CHARLES STEWART PARNELL, M. P.

EARLY in 1880, at the commencement of the movement for an occupying ownership or peasant proprietary in Ireland, and when this project had no friends amongst the Tory party, I was permitted to lay my views in regard to it before the readers of THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW. I then attempted to explain that the question would have to be dealt with in more ways than one, owing to the peculiar position of the large masses of small tenants occupying the congested districts in the west of Ireland; and that no measure for the solution of the land question would be satisfactory or complete which did not have regard to the condition of these small occupiers. This was one of the main reasons urged by us Irish members for denying to the Land Act of 1881 the attributes of finality and completeness which were at the time claimed for it by its friends and authors; and the succeeding years have amply justified us in the position we then took up.

We have again to-day to find fault, and to reject as insufficient and dishonest the Irish Land-Purchase Bill of the present Tory government, which has ostensibly been brought forward for the purpose of settling the land question on the lines laid down by me during my American tour. It is not unreasonable, then, that there should be some curiosity as to the motives which have influenced our attitude upon the present measure, and that we should be asked, "Why do you, whose platform was based upon occupying ownership, reject this bill, which, at least to some extent, appears to carry out your views?"

I have said that the measure is insufficient for its purpose. Pretending to be a great solution of the land question, it will not, at the outside, reach to more than one out of every four of the Irish tenants, and there will be many in this favored minority who have no right or claim to enjoy the benefits of land-purchase at the expense of the state, since they have neither the status of occupying nor of agricultural tenants. According to the method adopted and the scale of prices given, up to the present, under the operation of the previous enactments, it will take, as I stated in debate upon the second reading of the bill,—and my figures and statement were not contradicted,—upwards of one hundred and sixty-six millions of pounds sterling in order to enable all the Irish tenants entitled to do so to become the owners of their holdings. These figures show that an occupying ownership, carried out on such lines and at such prices, is impossible, as the state would never consent to lend the vast sum necessary for the purpose. We therefore hold that, before approaching the purchase question, it is necessary that the Land Act of 1881 should be so amended as to secure the tenant's improvements from the infliction of rent. Under the bill as it stands, the landlord is entitled to ask the tenant to pay him twenty years' purchase on the improvements which the tenant himself has made, as well as a similar rate for the landlord's property. By proceeding as I have suggested, first to secure the tenant's improvements from the infliction of rent, we should materially limit the size of the question and the amount of the sum involved, and render it much more manageable.

Again, I claim that a large area of the land proposed to be sold is held by tenants who, if they purchased, would not rightly come within the description of occupying owners or peasant proprietors. These men each occupy several large farms, and do not reside upon any of them. They use them simply as large grazing runs for cattle, employing no labor and making no outlay upon them. Three-fourths of Connaught is held in this fashion; at least one-third of Munster, and probably one-fourth of Leinster as well. Why, I ask, should such gentlemen graziers absorb much of the money and credit available for the settlement of the Irish land question, while the small and average-sized occupying tenants are left in the lurch, without any chance of obtaining the fee of their holdings? It was not for the advantage of the

graziers and the *gombeen* men that the flag of the land for the people was unfurled at Irishtown in 1879. By eliminating this class we make a further large and material reduction in the size of the question and the amount of money necessary for its solution.

Then, again, another abuse which has crept into the working of these land-purchase measures is that the landlords have in many cases divided their home farms and demesnes among bogus tenants, created out of sons, sons-in-law, bailiffs, and so forth, to whom they have sold at inflated prices. All this shows that the principle of land-purchase has been degraded into land-jobbery, and that the resources which, if husbanded, might have been sufficient for the settlement of the question, are being scandalously misspent, while the question is still left unsolved.

It is conceded on all sides that thirty-three millions of pounds sterling is the utmost extent of the further sum that the British tax-payer is ever likely to be induced to guarantee for land-purchase in Ireland, and that, when this has been exhausted, there will be no further credit for us to look to. It becomes, then, of vital importance that this amount should be husbanded; that it should be used for the purpose of creating an occupying ownership or peasant proprietary for the settlement of that portion of the Irish land question which presses, and that it should not be frittered and jobbed away and wasted in transactions which will not bear the slightest scrutiny.

I have now explained one of my main objections to the measure, that land-purchase has been carried out in such a way as to exhaust the resources available, while covering only one-fourth of the ground; and I have reason to believe that, if these resources were properly used and directed, they would be sufficient for a complete solution.

But this is not the only direction in which the principle of land-purchase is being abused and parodied. The grossest favoritism has been shown in the selection of the estates for whose purchase advances of public money are to be made. The large absentee owners have been favored, while the smaller resident owners have been left out. According to the returns which have been made to Parliament giving an account of sales up to December 31, 1888, we find that five hundred and thirty owners of land sold their estates to their tenants at an expenditure amounting to £3,792,000. Of these five hundred and thirty owners, thirty-

four walked off with £2,251,000, or six out of every one hundred owners who sold got away with 57 per cent. of the whole amount of the purchase money. Here are some of the names of these thirty-four landlords and the amounts that they have received:

The Duke of Abercorn	£267,000	The Duke of Leinster.....	£244,000
Sir Victor E. Brooke.....	83,000	The Earl of Normanton.....	34,000
Sir Thomas Lennard.....	108,000	Lord Ashbourne.....	10,000
The Salters' Company.....	230,000	Mr. Anthony Strong Hussey.....	53,000
The Fishmongers' Company.....	118,000	Earl Stanhope.....	39,000
The Skinners' Company.....	103,000	Lord Castletown.....	49,000
The Marquis of Waterford.....	124,000	Lord Kilmaine.....	53,000
The Marquis of Bath.....	290,000	Lord Ardilaun.....	8,000
Mr. George Lane Fox	67,000		

These amounts are taken in round numbers; but some of these landlords have since received a good deal more, as the particulars of sales that have been laid before Parliament only reach as far as December, 1888. Nine of these have taken £1,500,000, or 42 per cent. of the whole.

If, therefore, the provisions of this bill are to be carried out in a similar way to that which has been adopted under the previous acts, by the time that £40,000,000 have been spent, four hundred out of the ten thousand Irish land-owners will have received twenty-four millions out of the forty millions. This is not the manner in which we should like to see the Irish land question settled. If any selection is to be made, I would commence with the smaller resident owners throughout Ireland; and if any owner is to be favored, I would favor the men who have lived in the country, and who, at least, have spent their rents on their estates and among their neighbors.

I now come to an objection which is a very strong one—so strong, indeed, that I should not be surprised if its soundness obtained recognition before the passage of the bill through committee. I refer to the hypothecation, as a counter-guarantee against default upon the part of the new owners, of the amounts paid by Parliament for certain defined local purposes in Ireland in aid of local rates. This comprehends, amongst others, the Imperial contribution for medical comforts to the poor, for education, the maintenance of lunatics, and so forth. Upon all these violent hands are to be laid, if there is any default on the part of the large absentee graziers above alluded to in the payment of their instalments; and the fever-stricken peasant in his unsanitary cottage in Connemara is to go without quinine, while

he continues to pay his rackrent, in order that the happy owner of many large grazing farms may obtain a reduction of 30 per cent., and avoid the payment of even this reduced amount to the state. Again, amongst these Imperial contributions for local purposes are considerable sums of money which have been given in the case of England and Scotland to the county councils recently established by law, to spend as they please. These amounts in the case of Ireland are to be detained as a guarantee to the British tax-payer against possible default on the part of the new owners, while no sort of control over the terms of purchase is to be given either now or hereafter to the Irish local authorities.

I next approach a consideration which has, perhaps, influenced me as largely as anything else in the adoption of our policy in reference to these land-purchase proposals of the government. I allude to the existence of coercion in Ireland, which renders it impossible for the tenants to contract freely with their landlords in arranging the terms of sale. When we agreed to the passage of the Ashbourne Act in 1885, there was no coercion; there were, on the contrary, public declarations from Lord Salisbury, the present Prime Minister, and Lord Carnarvon, the then Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, against any recourse to such procedure. Land-purchase under these circumstances might have had a chance of working fairly to both sides. But the passage of the Coercion Act of 1887, rendering penal all combination and consultation on the part of the tenants, while it also forbids the offering of any advice to them, has changed all this, and the tenant with a load of arrears hanging over his head is helpless, and compelled to take any terms of purchase offered to him by his landlord, who presents a writ of eviction with the one hand and an agreement to purchase with the other. Mr. Joseph R. Cox, M.P., was prosecuted under this act for advising the tenants on an estate where a sale was contemplated not to give more than a certain amount for their holdings, and Mr. Patrick O'Brien, M.P., and others also, I believe, met with a similar fate.

At the commencement of this article I alluded to some references I made in 1880 to the congested districts in Ireland as an all-important and most necessary part of the question for solution. The method adopted by the bill for dealing with this portion of the subject secures a further waste of the resources available.

These districts are mainly confined to Connaught, and while they constitute the sole areas in that province requiring to be dealt with by the system of land-purchase at all, they also, as I have before said, comprise only about one-fourth in value of the province; the rest consisting of large grazing tracts destitute of inhabitants and houses. For the government measure proposes to devote the public money indifferently to the purchase of grass lands and congested holdings, and, by using a large proportion of the amount to be advanced under the bill for an unnecessary purpose,—viz., the conversion of a number of large graziers into owners,—an insufficient fund will be left for dealing with the congested areas, and this vital part of the question will practically be left untouched.

I should gladly welcome any honest intention on the part of the government to solve this land question. It is of great importance for us to get it out of the way before the time arrives for the larger settlement of home rule. Difficulties about land, if they should arise upon Mr. Gladstone's return to office, will materially hamper him and increase the arduous character of his task. Difficulties between landlord and tenant, if they should arise, will be most embarrassing for the Irish Parliament, and the future executive depending upon that Parliament. By all means settle it now. But this pretended Land-Purchase Bill is no solution. It seizes upon all our available resources, and hypothecates them without our consent. It jobs away the limited number of millions available, which, if husbanded and carefully directed, as I have shown, would go far—very far—toward removing all pressure and difficulty in the future. It selects the large and absentee owners for favored treatment, while it compels the tenant to buy his holding at an inflated price, with a load of arrears around his neck and the pistol of coercion at his head. We cannot be any party to a measure so brought forward and constituted. We shall resist it clause by clause in committee; we shall, if possible, amend it; and we believe that, as the progress of events has justified every vote that we have ever given in the House of Commons on the land question, and every step that we have ever taken to organize the Irish people against oppression, so our action against this most dishonest bill of a dishonest party and government will benefit Ireland and secure the verdict of history.

CHARLES STEWART PARNELL.